

THE RITUAL COMPLEX OF MANGALA

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A Coorg never says that a lamp has gone out. He says instead, 784
 'the lamp is brighter' (*boḷicha dumb pōchi*). This kind of euphemism 354
 is employed on other occasions also: the Kodagi word for a tiger is
 'nari' which means a jackal in every other Dravidian language.

Again, no Coorg says that 'a cobra has bitten So-and-so'. He
 says instead, 'a creeper has bitten So-and-so'. Finally, after nightfall
 no one mentions the barber. If they have to refer to him they say
 instead, 'the scraper of heads'. Amongst the Hindus in Mysore the
 barber is referred to after nightfall as 'one whose name may not be
 mentioned'. A barber is inauspicious, and contact with him is [305]
 defiling. He is also associated with inauspicious occasions such as
 death, as mourners have to be shaved. Women specially dread the
 barber, as until recently among the highest castes widows were
 required to have their heads shaved entirely.

In every one of the cases we have mentioned circumlocution is
 employed to avoid reference to an unpleasant object or event. The
 bite of a snake is always unpleasant and frequently fatal; a barber
 suggests death and widowhood; and it is much better to think of a
 tiger as a jackal. The euphemistic reference to the extinction of a [596]
 lamp has a similar purpose: a lamp is the symbol of the solidarity
 and strength of the *okka*, and its sudden extinction refers to the
 decay and extinction of the *okka*. It also refers to the withdrawal of [782]
 the protective power of the ancestors and the deities who are
 invoked while saluting a lamp.

Among the Hindus of the eastern plains it is obligatory to light a 788
 lamp in the house as soon as it is dark. A house without a lamp 354
 suggests that everyone is dead in the house, or that they are too
 poor to light one.

The ritual attitude prevalent towards the domestic lamp is easily [171]
 extended to fire generally, and to the sun. These again provide [821]
 points of contact with Sanskrit or All-India Hinduism.

The kitchen stove is a convenient focus for the general ritual 372 ●
 attitude existing towards fire. The kitchen stove, like the domestic 596
 lamp, stands for the unity, strength, and protective power of the
okka and this fact finds ritual expression. When a member of the [764]
okka is dead and it is decided to cremate his body, the funeral pyre
 is fired with a torch lighted from embers from the kitchen stove.
 The torch is made with twigs collected from the domestic burial-
 ground.

The belief in the protective power of *teḷi nṛ* is again the result of 372
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372 a ritual attitude towards the kitchen stove. A few embers from the
783 kitchen stove and a few grains of cooked rice from a vessel on the
stove are put into a dining-dish. Water is poured on the embers and
rice, and a thick, ashy liquid is formed in the dining-dish. This
liquid is *tefi ntr*, and great protective powers are attributed to it. The
mourners returning home on the eleventh day after performing the
rites in the burial-ground, a daughter-in-law returning to her
conjugal home with her baby born in her natal home, a member of
the house returning from a long journey, and a newly bought calf
are all sprinkled with it.

783 In the foregoing instances *tefi ntr* removes some inimical or
778 dangerous power in the person or object that is coming into the
house. People who are 'strangers' to the *okka* have this power in
[609] them. A child of a male member of the *okka* born in its mother's
372 natal house, a newly bought calf, a member long absent from home,
596 and a mourner are all 'strangers' for purposes of *tefi ntr*. Mem-
bers of the *okka* enjoy its protection and strength while persons
and objects outside it do not do so. Things that stand for the *okka*
represent its strength and protective power, and the kitchen stove
is an appropriate object to stand for the *okka*. The embers and
the cooked rice are both taken from the kitchen stove. The kitchen
stove and the dining-dish also stand for commensality which is a
basic feature of the *okka* in every part of India. In fact, commensality is a legal criterion of 'jointness'. Commensality denotes the
unity and strength of the *okka*. Commensality is an act of solidarity.
Absence of commensality indicates division. In a country like
India where all kinds of ritual rules surround eating, commensality
assumes even greater importance than what it would have in
another society.

372 The domestic lamp, as long as it is burning, indicates that the
776 protective power of the *okka* is active, and its going out indicates
171 the withdrawal of such protective power. Such withdrawal spells
dangers to the members of the *okka*. The domestic lamp led to a
consideration of the significance of the kitchen stove, and this in
turn led to a consideration of fire generally and the sun. In
Sanskritic or All-India Hinduism, Agni is the god of fire and he
is related to Sāvitār or Sūrya, the sun-god. Agni and Sūrya are
deities in the Vēdas and they are known and understood all over
Hindu India. The local phenomenon of the attribution of sacred-
ness to the domestic lamp and kitchen stove is absorbed into the

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All-India worship of Agni and Sūrya.¹ Coorgs are drawn into an 776
 All-India ritual idiom which is mainly Sanskritic in character. 372
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The sprinkling of rice on a person or thing is a common ritual 783
 act in Coorg, and it is one of the several acts which together form 846
 the ritual of *mūrta*. An instance of the ritual sprinkling of rice will
 be considered now with a view to discovering its meaning.

Birth results in pollution for the mother, the new-born infant,
 and the *okka* of which the mother is a member. While the other
 members of the polluted *okka* attain normal ritual status on the
 twelfth day of birth, the mother herself remains polluted till the
 sixtieth day. On that day, after a bath which ends her long period
 of pollution, she performs a certain ritual which signifies her
 resumption of her normal, pre-pollution duties.

One of her normal duties is the bringing of water from the [312]
 domestic well into the kitchen, and the resumption of this particular
 duty is dramatized in '*Ganga pūja*' (worship of Ganga or Ganges).
 The confined woman has a bath, after which she changes into
 ritually pure garments. She then goes to the domestic well accom-
 panied by two married women. First of all she salutes the sun by
 throwing some rice grains into the air, and this is followed by
 putting small quantities of rice thrice into the well. She then drops
 a few betel leaves, with the smooth side on top, into the well, and
 also empties the milk of a slit coconut into it. Finally, the confined
 woman and, after her, her two companions draw water from the
 well in vessels and carry the latter into the kitchen.

During the later stages of pregnancy, and for two months after
 the birth of the child, the confined woman has been freed from all
 domestic duties. The resumption of her domestic duties on the
 sixtieth day of the birth of the child is dramatized in the ritual of
 '*Ganga pūja*'. Her relationship with the domestic well has been
 broken for some time and the resumption of this relationship is
 not without a certain amount of 'awkwardness', as in the case of [778]
 two human beings. The worship of the domestic well, the solidarity
 rites performed towards it, the offering of betel leaves and a
 coconut all make the process of resumption of contact smoother.

¹ It may be argued, however, that the attribution of sacredness to the domestic
 lamp and stove is derived from the worship of Agni and Sūrya, and not vice
 versa.

so short as to render this so-called cotton commercially valueless. The wood is soft and spongy and of little value. Another red cotton tree of smaller size and with a prickly trunk is the *Salmalia Malabarica* (Can. Mulu yelava). The Dindul or "*Conocarpus latifolius*" is a fine timber tree and very frequent in the deciduous jungles. The heart-wood is of a chocolate colour and exceedingly durable. The Kurubas use it for axe-handles. When burning it emits an intense and sustained heat and is therefore highly prized for lime kilns and distilleries. The *Hedde-mara* or "*Nauclea cordifolia*" yields a beautiful close-grained wood resembling box; but it cannot withstand exposure to damp. Its small yellow flowers appear in November and December. The "*Rottleria tinctoria*" furnishes an orange dye—the kapela rang. The *Soap-nut tree* (*sapindus*) which is here rather common, produces a small fruit, the pulp of which is saponaceous and used by the natives for washing. For marking their cotton clothes the pure black acrid juice of the shell of the "marking nut" is used; it is the fruit of a tree about 50 feet high, the *Semercarpus Anacardium*. The native ink is chiefly manufactured with the fruit or galls of the *Alali-mara* and sulphate of iron. This tree, the *Terminalia chebula*, yields excellent galls produced by insects puncturing the tender leaves. The astringent nuts bruised and mixed with molasses and chunam produce a very strong mortar. They are also largely used for tannin purposes.

On the outskirts of bamboo jungles the *Indian Coral tree* (*Erythrina Indica*) with its brilliant scarlet flowers may be frequently found; its soft wood is much used for toys. On account of its prickly bark the branches make good fences, and where the betel vine is cultivated this tree offers an excellent support. A very pretty tree with spreading pinnate foliage and gooseberry like seeds is the *Nelli-kai-mara* or "*Emblica Officinalis*." The fruit though hard is welcome to many for its thirst assuaging properties. Sometimes it is Preserved in Sugar.

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